

Madam Chair/Mr. Chairman, members of the Environment Committee, my name is James Robinson. I am an elected representative of Norfolk's board of finance and a lifelong resident of this town. In addition, I have spent almost 20 years implementing environmental regulations as a U.S. Coast Guard Reserve officer. As such, I am familiar with the enforcement of constructive environmental legislation as well as the unintended consequences of poorly drafted policy.

I am here to speak today in opposition to proposed House Bill 63-45 - an act to limit the diversion of water for recreational purposes from the federally designated Highlands region of Connecticut. At best this proposed legislation appears arbitrary and capricious. At worst this proposal seems a "poison pill" designed to kill a project that has been moving these past 5 years through established local, state, and federal environmental review processes. The project is the Yale Farm Golf Club in the towns of Norfolk and North Canaan.

I have several issues on which to comment. The first has to do with environmental concerns. The second has to do with economic concerns. The third is observation on public policy and the process of governing.

From day one a series of environmental arguments has been raised by detractors of this project, each purporting to demonstrate conclusively the disastrous consequences that a golf course would have on the headwaters and lands abutting Hollow Brook and Ginger Creek. First it was claimed that the project would destroy hundreds of acres of inland wetlands. Listening carefully and soberly to the detractors, project coordinators presented a course design with a net increase in wetlands habitat. Next detractors moved to the hazards of chemicals and fertilizers on the watershed. Project coordinators showed that the recycled water systems and best management practices with organic fertilizers in their design far exceeded the standards deemed appropriate by state and local authorities. (Yale Farm Golf Club also pledged to underwrite the costs of ongoing monitoring of water quality in the future, a commitment that far exceeds those made by other area country clubs.) The next impediment thrown at the project was a search for endangered species. Detractors settled on the Bog Turtle as the most likely candidate in this regard. Yale Farm Golf Club hired one of the leading experts on Bog Turtles to investigate the matter. He determined that there were no Bog Turtles on Yale Farm and that it was highly unlikely that they would exist at the altitudes that characterize the

western slope of Bald Mountain. I could spend the entire morning going over additional potential environmental "roadblocks" put before the project over the past 5 years. This includes the latest charges of excessive groundwater use. Suffice it to say that in each instance the claim has been exhaustively examined and resolved by the project coordinators in conjunction with requisite local, state and federal regulatory authorities.

It has been suggested by detractors that, far from being an economic stimulus, the golf course would be economically detrimental to the region. This seems hardly credible. In good times or bad, the creation of a multimillion dollar business that has met exhaustive environmental review in our two towns is a cause for hope. To kill such a project in bad times however seems the height of folly. As the federal government is desperately lining up public funding to build "shovel ready projects," detractors of the Yale Farm Golf Club are still working intently to bury this one. The fact that private investors still wish to invest in our towns is noteworthy and worth encouraging.

Finally, I would like to speak to the importance of local rule and due process. Ladies and gentlemen I am an elected representative of my town. It galls me no end that we have spent tens of thousands of dollars and thousands of hours reviewing this proposal through carefully laid out processes and procedures only to have all our work made moot by a last minute legislative end run. We have even defended our commissions in court and been upheld. House Bill 63-45 is nothing more than a poison pill designed to lure uninformed legislators into killing this project because detractors of the Yale Farm Golf Club have repeatedly failed to prove the validity of their arguments against the project to their fellow citizens on local boards and commissions or the regulatory scientists responsible for reviewing their claims. If passed it would represent a rank usurpation of authority and the upending of established procedure. This is terrible public policy and I urge you to vote against it.

Thank you for your time and attention to me this morning

Sincerely, James Robinson